Improving Hiring in the Federal Government:
A Case Study

Message from the President

"We've asked people to serve this government, and you've made great sacrifices, and I want to thank you for that. You could be doing a lot of easier things probably, and a lot of jobs where you get better recognition. So I want to thank you for making this sacrifice. But more importantly, I want to thank you for setting high standards."

- George W. Bush

Message from the Director

"The talent is out there and people are interested. We need to get better at bringing them in the door. In a competitive marketplace, timeliness is often the deciding factor. Yet I continue to see statistical and anecdotal evidence that we still have a long way to go to make our hiring process competitive for the best talent America has to offer."
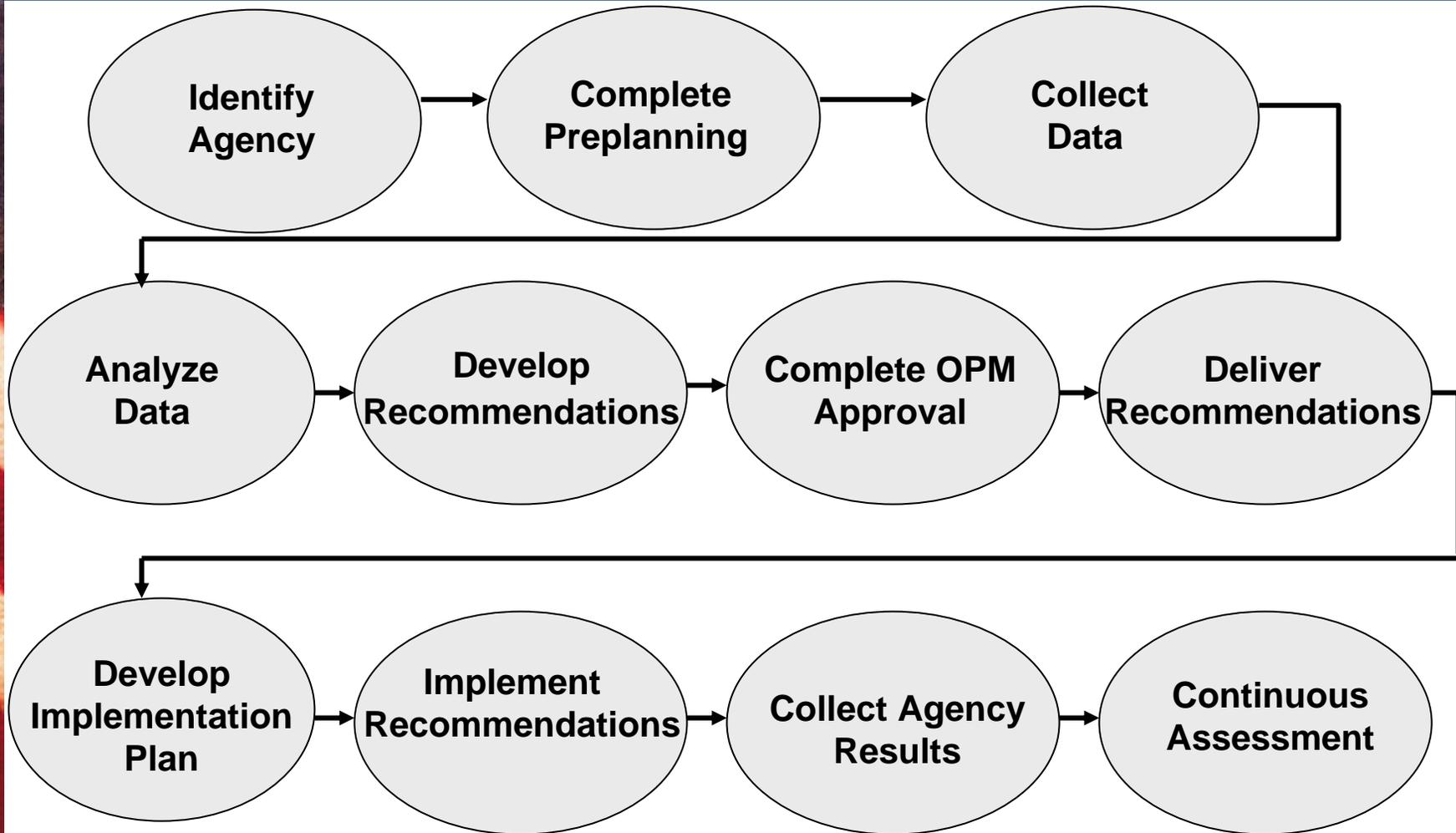
- Kay Coles James

Statement of Opportunity

In her memorandum of February 10, 2004, Director James outlined a series of flexibilities and other suggestions for improving Federal hiring. On May 6, 2004, the Director proposed a 45-day hiring model to improve a process that she found to be "<u>slow, cumbersome, and unresponsive</u>."

Improving the Hiring Process

Identify Agency → Complete Preplanning → Collect Data → Analyze Data → Develop Recommendations → Complete OPM Approval → Deliver Recommendations → Develop Implementation Plan → Implement Recommendations → Collect Agency Results → Continuous Assessment

Identify Agency

- Agency volunteers
- Future scoring requirement

Complete Pre-planning

- Determine resources (People, Time, Budget)
- Identify key players and decision makers
- Determine scope/timeline
- Conduct preliminary meetings
- Plan communication strategy

Collect Data

- Determine resources
- Review internal policy
- Conduct focus groups, individual interviews, & meetings
- Conduct case reviews & process reviews
- Gather archival data

Analyze Data

- Categorize issues
- Analyze and prioritize themes
- Review best practices
- Validate findings from various data collection methods

Develop Recommendations

- Write report
- Provide short/long term recommendations
- Formulate metrics

Complete OPM Approval

- Conduct internal briefings
- Obtain full OPM concurrence

Deliver Recommendations

- Brief Agency officials and CHCO
- Communicate plan throughout Agency
- Obtain Agency comments on findings
- Post report on OPM/Agency website

Develop Implementation Plan

- Establish Agency team to address recommendations
- Collaborate with OPM on implementing recommendations

Implement Recommendations

- Designate action teams
- Implement recommendations
- Implement ongoing measurements
- Collaborate with OPM

Hiring Timeliness: Key Metrics

- Vacancy rate (number and length of time of vacancies)
- Hiring timeliness (# of days from receipt of SF-52 in HR office to date of offer, by recruiting source)
- Offer acceptance rate (% of job offers accepted)
- Applications per recruiting source (% of applications by source)
- High quality candidate ratio(# of candidates rated high quality/total # of qualified candidates)

Collect Agency Results

- Agency collects ongoing hiring measurements
- Agency documents success

Continuous Assessment

- Ensures that this is an iterative process
- Refers back to key metrics
- Establishes accountability through tracking

Message from the Director

"Several agencies have offered to partner with OPM to conduct a thorough review of their hiring processes…Over the next few weeks, we will be doing in-depth interviews and focus groups, mapping the process and uncovering all the outmoded practices that delay hiring."

- Kay Coles James

Hiring Timeliness Focus Groups:
What is a Focus Group?

- A focus group is a qualitative research tool for gathering information from a homogenous group of people in a focused discussion

- Focus group purpose:
  - to understand how people feel or think about an issue, product, service or idea

- Focus group characteristics:
  - eight to 15 people, depending on the purpose
  - conducted by a skilled moderator
  - in a comfortable environment

Focus Group Process: How Long Does It Take?

- Typically 6-week process from plan to report
- Invitations: "we are inviting people to share ideas and opinions about barriers to hiring timeliness…"
- Desirable number of questions:
  - 6 to 10 open-ended questions, maximum of 12
- Focus group length:
  - 1 to 2 hours

Focus Group Process: Planning

- Determine problem: slow hiring process
- Determine information needed: barriers to hiring timeliness from different perspectives
- Identify target audience: HR staff, managers, new hires
- Decide how information will be used: to streamline hiring process
- Determine how many focus groups are needed:
  - 3 to 4 with any type of participant

Focus Group Process:
Recruitment for HUD Focus Groups

- Agency staff recruited participants:
  - HR staff involved in staffing and recruitment
  - Hiring managers
  - New hires:
    - professional/administrative
    - technical
    - administrative support
- Focus group facilitator sent thank-you letters and made follow-up phone calls one day prior to focus group to ensure attendance

Multi-Category Design of Focus Groups

12 HUD Focus Groups

	Participants		
Location	**New Hires**	**Managers**	**HR Staff**
Washington, DC	1: managers 1: clerical	1	1
Atlanta	1: professional/ administrative	1	1
New York	1: professional/ administrative	1	1
Denver		1	1
Total	**4**	**4**	**4**

HUD Focus Group Process: Questioning Routes

- Developed 3 questioning routes for:
  - HR staff
  - Hiring managers
  - New hires
- Experts reviewed questioning routes and probes (prompts to elicit desired information)
- First focus group served as pilot, minor revisions were made
- Standardized questioning routes were used by all facilitators

Focus Group Process:
Qualities of Good Questions*

Good Questions:

- sound conversational
- use words participants would use
- are easy to say
- are clear
- are short
- are open-ended
- are one-dimensional

*Source: Krueger, R.A. & Casey, M.A. *Focus Groups* (2002, Sage Publications

HUD Focus Group Process: Barriers to Hiring Timeliness

Examples of Questions

- What is your understanding of your role in the hiring process (for managers and HR staff)?

- What are some of the barriers that prevent timely hiring?

- What aspects of the hiring process are most time-consuming?

- What do you wish HR staff (or managers) would do differently to expedite the hiring process?

- How did you feel about your treatment as an applicant?

HUD Focus Group Process:
Focus Group Session and Report

- Each focus group was conducted with a moderator and note-taker who recorded discussion on laptop computer

- Note-taker and moderator produced structured summary of focus group noting
  - key issues for each question
  - notable quotes

- Project manager reviewed all focus group summaries and prepared a report, integrating results and identifying key issues and barriers

HUD Focus Group Results:
7 Barriers to Hiring Timeliness

1. Redundant approval processes due to lack of delegated authority
2. Ineffective coordination and planning
3. Ineffective or no automated processes
4. Limited knowledge of effective assessment strategies
5. Limited use of hiring flexibilities due to
   lack of information and training
   lack of delegated authority
   lack of funding
6. Inadequate staff resources
7. Lack of role clarity (HR staff vs. managers)

Contact Information

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